

Relationships that Nurture

Monthly tips provided by St. David's Center in partnership with Mom Enough

Recognizing Childhood Depression

Audio can be heard at the end of the [5/28/12 ME interview](#)

It's easy to assume that young children don't get sad; after all, they play all day and take naps. But the reality is that depression is not defined by age and it is very real across the lifespan.

I. Taking it seriously

It is critical that you take your young child's emotions seriously. Their feelings are equally as deep and intense as an older child or an adult. However, they have yet to develop the skills to manage or verbalize their intense range of emotions and will need safe adult relationships to help them.

II. Symptoms

All children can present with the following symptoms; what's important is the duration. If these symptoms last for longer than two to three weeks, it is time to check-in with your pediatrician regarding physical health. If your child's pediatrician is able to rule out physical health concerns, it may be time to check-in with a mental health professional that specializes in young children.

Depressed young children often present as irritable or withdrawn. This can look many ways. As a parent, you know what is atypical for your child. Here are possible symptoms:

- Sadness
- Grouchy or crabby
- Defiant
- Low energy, low motivation, fatigue
- Swinging emotions
- Highly sensitive
- Excessive crying
- Withdrawal from activities the child typically enjoys, aggressive or consistent negative play
- Changes in eating and sleeping
- Poor coping

III. Treatment

Early onset depression can often become persistent and reoccurring throughout the lifetime. It is commonly associated with other mental health disorders including anxiety and disruptive behavior. However, it is important to know that depression is treatable. With young children, it is essential to be engaged as a family in your child's treatment. A parent is a child's safest adult and you will need to team with both your child and your child's therapist to create a treatment plan and change.